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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON PARTICIPATION OF TEACHERS IN MANAGEMENT¹

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This is the fourth report that has been made to the National Council on the subject of participation of teachers in management. Since the committee was first appointed for this study the number of organizations, committees, councils, clubs, etc., has steadily increased until now they may be found in city school systems of all sizes throughout the United States. It is evident that teacher participation in management has come to stay; it is just as clear, however, that there is not as yet any special form of participation which is generally accepted as the best adapted to any particular set of conditions.

From the beginning the purpose of the committee has been to study, with the aid of as full and as definite knowledge of the facts as can be obtained, the different forms of participation of teachers in management and the results of the operation of each. In the first years of the committee's activities, there were set forth those principles of management which made clear the necessity for some form of participation of workers in the conduct of enterprises of every kind, the objects that were to be gained by such activity, and the criteria by which the results were to be judged.

The committee also directed its attention to the making of a careful study of the chief form in which teacher participation had been manifested up to that time, namely, the part taken by teachers in the making of courses of study. The information was gathered through a questionnaire which furnished for the most part numerical statements of an objective nature. The study was published in 1918 in monograph form by the National Education Association as part of the *Report of the Committee on Superintendents' Problems*. It showed that the organizations used for this participation were

¹ Presented to the National Council at the meeting of the Department of Superintendence, February, 1922.

almost all of the type called the "temporary committee," of which there were numerous forms, ranging from those dominated by the superintendents of school to those in which the superintendent studiously avoided having anything to do with the committee in any stage of its work. According to the opinions of 90 per cent of the superintendents, participation of teachers is a positive benefit to the schools, to the teachers, and to the superintendents, in the making of the course of study as well as in improving methods of teaching. In fact, the study proved conclusively that teacher participation in the making of courses of study should be adopted by city school systems generally without regard to the size of the city. However, the data secured did not warrant any conclusion as to which form of committee is best.

This study was inaugurated before teachers' councils came into prominence and was originally undertaken because it was believed that such a study might be of positive benefit to school management. Regarding the more formal and permanent agency of teacher participation—the teachers' council—it was impossible to make a similar study until it had been in operation for a longer period of time. The efforts of the committee were therefore confined at first to the statement of those administrative and social principles that should determine the purpose, the functions, and the structure of such an organization, taking into account, also, the varying sets of limiting conditions which might affect form and structure.

A year later it was possible to secure the constitutions of a number of such organizations as had been given administrative sanction in order to make a comparative study of their structure. This study, made by Mr. Orton and presented to the National Council last year, has been supplemented by studies by Mr. Seares, Mr. Cummings, and Miss Hebb, Mr. Seares' being most valuable from the point of view of describing the types of organizations existing. These studies show a surprising variety in structure.

These studies present another example of that unique characteristic of our democratic form of government which is both our strength and our weakness. Each locality has proceeded alone, or at least has decided for itself the structure and the functions of

its formal organ, thus making it possible to carry on a vast amount of experimentation under varying conditions. While each organization standing alone has not been as correct in its form as it would have been had the plans been determined by some central agency informed concerning the theory and practice of such an organization, this period of experimentation has made it possible to secure in the future a better adaptation of these agencies to existing conditions than could have been suggested by expert authority.

It seems to the committee that the time has come when a study of the functioning of these organizations known in general as teachers' councils can well be made. In the working out of this study three controlling principles should be recognized. First, conclusions must be based on facts stated as definitely and as accurately as possible; second, the structure of an organ must be determined primarily by the functions it is to perform; and, third, structure, although determined primarily by functions to be performed, is affected to a marked degree by the conditions under which it must work.

The committee has therefore prepared a questionnaire which seeks to secure information as to how efficiently the different structures have operated in the performance of their functions under the influence of the particular environments in so far as such facts can be ascertained by the questionnaire method. The facts obtained, together with such supplementary information as may be gathered, will be studied for the purpose of answering in as satisfactory a manner as possible the following questions: First, under what conditions, if any, is a permanently organized teacher participation agency desirable and under what conditions, if any, is it undesirable? While the principles presented by this committee have pointed to certain conclusions, there is needed an evaluation of them in terms of the outcomes of actual experience. It is only in such a way as this that theory and practice may be made of the greatest possible benefit to each other. Second, in case it is found desirable to have a permanent formal organization for the participation of teachers in management, what form of organization is best adapted to perform each specified function under each specified set of conditions?

From surface indications it seems that these organizations are not working as smoothly and as effectually as was expected by their sponsors, nor are they accomplishing what might be expected of them. The reason for this may be, in part at least, that they have attempted to perform functions that can be better carried out by some agency other than a council, or that their forms of structure are such that they cannot accomplish the purpose. It has frequently happened that the primary purpose of a teachers' council was to secure an increase in salaries; consequently the structure was properly framed for securing the representation and participation of all groups of teachers. The organization thus created has since performed such varying functions as improving the course of study, arranging for courses of lectures for the benefit of teachers, providing clubrooms and forms of social entertainment, or working for the passage of certain bills by the legislature. Some of these functions are an integral part of the operation of the school system; others are not. Some require one kind of ability; others, another kind. It would seem that there must necessarily be a vast amount of wasted energy and of imperfect accomplishments when the same organization is engaged in such varied activities. Moreover, the reasons for failure will probably be found in some cases, not in the poor adaptation of structure to functions, but in the poor adaptation of structure to such conditions as the nature and structure of other teachers' organizations and the functions performed by them, the authority conferred by the school board on the superintendent, the intelligence and the ideals of the teaching corps, the ability and leadership of the superintendent and the principals, and the spirit of the personnel as a whole. These practical considerations are very important and at times dominant as far as practical results are concerned. It thus frequently happens that they destroy the true perspective. In all probability these local situations or personal views, producing selfish or low aims in individuals or groups, often stand in the way of the real progress that would result if the organization as created were given a fair opportunity.

It may not be amiss to present in the final section of this report a brief review of the more important criteria that seem to determine

the success or failure of organizations for the participation of teachers in management.

First, any agency for the participation of teachers in management in any school system must produce a better realization of the aims set up by that particular school system for the education of its children. This means that teacher participation is not introduced primarily for the benefit of either the teachers or the superintendent but exists rather for the benefit of the children. Consequently, if it does not benefit the children, it ought not to exist.

The value of this criterion is more apparent in those school systems in which recognition is given to the principle of individual differences and where every possible effort is made to meet the needs of each individual child. This is undoubtedly the most important criterion to use in passing upon the value of any teacher participation plan.

Second, a teacher participation organization should promote the efficiency of the teaching corps; that is, it should make teachers more competent in instruction, more responsive to leadership, and more loyal to the schools. Since the importance of the teacher becomes more apparent in a scheme of instruction which recognizes the principle of individual differences, it will be seen that we must exert greater effort than heretofore to make of each teacher the best possible teacher. Fundamental in this is the recognition of the desire innate in practically every teacher to make the most of himself or herself, but recognition not for himself or herself primarily but for the sake of the pupils who by virtue of better teaching ability are to receive superior guidance and help.

Nevertheless, it seems to be true that some teachers believe in teacher participation not for the sake of the children but for the sake of themselves, in order that they may obtain a position in the organization and enjoy the exercise of power and receive the honor and adulation of their fellow teachers, or in some instances in order that they may satisfy some grudge held against the superintendent or the school board.

Third, it follows that a teacher participation agency should make it possible for the superintendent to accomplish more and better work.

There are some superintendents who would not accept these as proper criteria. Their own attitude or experience leads them to believe that councils have different purposes or that the purposes stated are unattainable through them. I personally believe that experience thus far proves that they are both proper and attainable. At the same time, I think that there are many misconceptions that must be cleared up. The superintendent should not have any of his rightful authority diminished; nor, on the other hand, should he desire to dictate the procedure of the school. Teachers should regard the superintendent as the responsible leader of the school and give him loyal support; they should not expect to take over his functions. It is when misconceptions and selfish aims intervene that co-operative effort fails. What should be done under such circumstances, it is difficult to say. Personally, I am inclined to favor the side, when there is a side, whose attitude is right, that is, to deny to teachers who would misuse their power the right of a council and to grant it to those teachers whose superintendent is dictatorial. Should both have the wrong attitude, an impossible situation would exist, and neither course should be followed. Surely it would be time in such a school system for another superintendent and for changes in the teaching corps. It will be the function of the committee to study such situations and test the validity of the foregoing conclusions.

In summarizing, we may say that teacher participation organizations seemingly have come to stay, that they are performing a great variety of functions, that they are variously constituted, and that there are undoubtedly many cases of poor adaptation of structure to the functions performed. We need, in many quarters of the country, a clearer understanding of the aims of teacher participation and also some well-defined criteria as to when teacher participation is functioning properly and when it should be redirected or, possibly in some instances, reformed or abolished altogether. The experiences that we are having in this initial stage of development should be gathered together as rapidly as conditions permit and studied carefully, and conclusions formulated in order that there may be the least waste and the least delay in the advancement of education.